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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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medical left has begun. On September 12th, 1980, a military coup suspending all kinds of political associations, labor unions, and political parties occurred in response to the escalating political violence between the Left and the right in Turkey. Prior to the coup, Turkey's political scene had been characterized by chronic instability. In 1975, a conservative coalition government formed by the Justice Party (AP), the Nationalist Front (MC), the Islamic fundamental National Salvation Party (MSP), and the ultra-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) attempted to govern the country after the collapse of the center-left, socialist Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) government. However the coalition did not last for very long and there was another general election in 1977 with no clear winner. In the meantime, there was a severe economic crisis, which was triggered by the OECD oil crisis of 1973. Inflation reached triple digit by 1979. The combination of economic crises and political instability precipitated a cycle of violence between leftist and right-wing organizations that resulted in over 5,000 deaths, a number of incidents, including the Taksim Square Massacre in 1977, the Gangelevler Massacre in 1978, and the Kahramanmara Massacre in 1978 heightened the crises in Turkish society and created a pretext for military intervention.

On the other hand, there are some indications that the Turkish left has been able to adapt to the new circumstances. The archives of websites and forums that have Turkish-speaking online communities with leftist inclinations show a steady decline in any references to organizations such as HDKP-C (the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front) or TIKKO in the 2000s. This is partly because the post-1989 generation in Turkey grew up without any contact with the Left. Any sort of reference to the communist or revolutionary left was outlawed in the 1982 constitution and the anti-terrorism laws of the 1990s put most organizations members in jail. After the Gezi protests, which offered a great publicly opportunity for these organizations, one can see a visible increase in the number of positive and negative references made to radical left organizations on the same websites. The online communities on some of these websites have over 360,000 registered members. One can also see a lot more news in the mainstream media on demonstrations after Gezi Park. Both examples are ample evidence that some sort of re-vitalization of interest in the

Prior to the Gezi protests, most radical left organiza-
tions were soon evident, as the first group tried to
distance themselves from the "other" Gezi Park. Even-
tually, the escalating rift between the two groups cre-
ated an opportunity for authorities to intervene. The
pretext of the first police incursion on the 11th was to rid
the area of so-called "marginal elements."²⁸ Despite the
break between the radical left and the other Gezi Park
occupants, the protests have re-vitalized the radical,
non-parliamentary left traditions throughout Turkey. As
the case globally, the left in Turkey, and the radical
left in particular, had been in steady decline since the
early 1980s. Yet in Turkey the decline can be traced
more specifically to the coup of 1980.

over the ongoing protests while the social media was
washed with images of appalling violence. Prime minister
Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave a televised speech accusing
the demonstrators of being capricious [looters] and threat-
ening them. A couple of days later, the mainstream me-
dia blackout of the demonstrations finally ended and the
prime minister left the country for a three-day tour of
North Africa. Meanwhile, the occupation of Gezi Park had
expanded and was beginning to turn into an autonomous
area, complete with its own kitchen, hospital, and num-
erous municipal services. Since June 1st, the police had withdrawn
from the park and from the neighbouring Taksim Square
area, allowing demonstrators to occupy vacated build-
ings in the vicinity. Amongst the buildings occupied was
the iconic Ataturk Cultural Center (AKM). The absence of
the police in the area lasted until June 11th, when the
police returned and took back Taksim Square from the
protesters and washed off the graffiti and slogans. Fi-
nally, the occupation of Gezi Park ended on June 15th,
when police stormed the park, dispersing the occupiers.
A schism emerged during the 11 days of occupation
around the Gezi Park and Taksim Square area between
two separate groups of occupiers. The majority of pro-
testers occupying the area were middle-class citizens
with no affiliations to radical organizations. For most of
these participants, the Gezi Park protests were about
making a statement against a government with an Is-
lamist agenda, which had begun to encroach on the
secular lifestyle of the protesters. These protesters
were mainly gathered in the Gezi Park area and were
the focal point for both national and foreign media out-
lets covering the event. There was another group of par-
ticipants in the protests, however, that received a lot
less media coverage. This group consisted of the radical
left and often outlawed organizations that had estab-
lished themselves around Taksim Square and around
the barricades built during the occupation. The two
groups of protesters cooperated in the face of their
common adversaries, but tensions between the two

participation of
t in the Gezi

100 civilian injuries. Even Sirri Sürreyya Şahin, a MP, was hospitalised after being hit by a tear gas canister. Images and videos of the incident quickly spread via social media and a demonstration of more than 10,000 participants gathered on nearby İskitlâh Avenue. The protesters held İskitlâh Avenue and Gezi Park overnight as demonstrators spread to Ankara and İzmir. Park was no longer a protest against the demolition of a park, but instead the focal point for people from all walks of life expressing their frustrations with the government.

On June 1st, Istanbul was at a standstill as thousands of protesters closed down the Bosphorus Bridge and crossed over on foot from the eastern side of the city to large public square located next to Gezi Park. Mainstream media outlets in Turkey were still refusing to

Ataturk Cultural Centre (AKM) on the 11th of June. "Isyan" means revolution or uprising in Turkish.



ON MAY 28th, 2013, a group of environmental activists gathered to protest the demolition of Gezi Park, a small urban park in central Istanbul. As the municipal authorities intensified their efforts to evict the activists, the number of demonstrators began to grow. On the morning of the 31st, police raided the demonstrators' camp and resorted to violence, resulting in more than

Ivo Fushman

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What is imperialism?

(What now?)

James Turley, Joseph Green, and Larry Everest

On April 6, 2013, a panel on “What is Imperialism? (What Now?)” took place during the Platypus International Convention at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The panel was motivated by the ten-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and aimed to discuss whether we are any closer to understanding what imperialism is and the relationship between anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. This panel brought together Larry Everest from the Revolutionary Communist Party (USA), Joseph Green from Communist Voice, and James Turley of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and was moderated by Lucy Parker of Platypus. What follows is an edited transcript of the conversation. A video can be found online at <http://media.platypus1917.org>.

James Turley: Imperialism poses a series of problems for us as Marxists and they can broadly be divided into theoretical problems and political problems. The theoretical problems are characterized by the sharp inequalities between states, and this is as much a feature of the global order as the very obvious inequality and exploitative relations between classes. This arrangement has serious effects on how the class struggle plays out in different countries. Imperialism also poses a problem of the historical periodization of capitalism. This is the problem of imperialism as a particular stage of capital-

ism. Even if imperialism is not a particular stage, it is still in this historical sense a kind of carbon-dating mechanism. With regard to political problems, it is clear that imperialism, as a system of unequal relations between states, is a way in which state power is organized globally. In this sense, the paramount political problem facing us as Marxists and revolutionaries, if we want to overthrow capitalism globally, is that the highest level of state power requires a serious political challenge.

Another issue which has come up, particularly in the last ten years, but which really has existed since at least the early days of the Comintern, is the attitude that we take to forces that are not strictly speaking of the Left but that nevertheless confront and oppose imperialist powers in military conflicts or in other ways. This issue, of course, has caused a serious division on the Left. The guidebook for how we have traditionally dealt with this as a movement is Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), which is a sort of brief and very empirical analysis of the nature of imperialism. The background for Lenin’s work was the much larger debate over colonial policy and imperialism in the Second International that began in 1896. Karl Kautsky, who was the foremost theorist of the Second International, wrote a series of articles called *Socialism and Colonial Policy* arguing that early empires—such as those of the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch—were effectively pre-capitalist in nature. They did not export capitalist relations of production, but rather were coercive, absolutist exploitation operations. According to Kautsky, these empires gave way, with the ascent of England as an imperial power, to what he called “Manchesterism.” This was free-trade imperialism. Instead of having coercive and brutal operations—this is Kautsky’s view by the way, it is obviously not true—what you had was the elimination of trade barriers and the expansion of capitalism as a system. Kautsky was writing in 1896 and 1897, by which point it was clear that the mechanisms which led to the First World War were accelerating, and the German state was attempting to acquire colonies. Kautsky’s argument is that the Scramble for Africa and similar forms of late-nineteenth-century imperial expansion are an expression of pre-capitalist forces in Germany and other states, and that this imperialism is actually reactionary with regard to “Manchesterism.”

Lenin breaks radically with the final part of Kautsky’s periodization but keeps the other two parts essentially intact. He argues that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism and that—with the accelerated concentration of the forces of production, the formation of monopolies, and the dominance of finance capital (a term Lenin takes from Hilferding)—there is a drive to find

external markets for capital and to export capital. Lenin argues that, previous to this period, imperial powers exported commodities rather than capital. He also famously argues that this is the ground for the emergence of reformism in the workers’ movement because a layer of the working class is effectively bribed with the super-profits won via imperialism.

My view is that this is ultimately no longer an adequate account. “Manchesterism” never existed. Inasmuch as Britain promoted free trade, it was because Britannia “ruled the waves” and benefited from free trade since it controlled the trade routes. In places such as India, as we all know, the brutality of the colonial project did not go away. Furthermore, capital exports began much earlier and did not originate in the 1860s and 1870s. Finally, the concept of the labor aristocracy does not explain the emergence of mass reformist parties in Latin America or anywhere else that is not an imperial power. Where are the super-profits in Brazil being used to bribe the Workers’ Party? I do not see them.

I would argue instead that imperialism is not a stage of capitalism but rather an underlying, fundamental dynamic which goes hand in hand with the rise of capitalist state regimes. The Italian city-states of the Renaissance acquired colonies and exported capital to them in order to establish sugar production. The export of capital goes back to the fifteenth century, and was a feature of the earliest capitalist state regimes in Holland and Portugal. Not all modern empires were capitalist—the Spanish empire was effectively feudal—but many of the early-modern empires, such as that of the Dutch, maintained colonial plantations to which capital was exported. British expansion in India entailed the export of capital, the building of railways, and the establishment of cotton farms which were tied in with high industry in northwest England.

There is a tendency for world-hegemonic states to arise simply because capitalism needs such a state to reproduce itself in any meaningful sense. Capitalism requires means of coercion that are global in extent in order to enforce international trade, as it is fundamentally a worldwide mode of production. Hence, the Dutch supremacy was followed by the British supremacy. The hegemonic project ultimately leads to the hypertrophy of military and financial capital as it were, which then leads to additional problems and decline. What Lenin interprets as a terminal stage of capitalism—and he is absolutely correct to state that the world was breaking down—can retrospectively be seen as a period in which British hegemony broke down, eventually to be surmounted by American hegemony. It is clear now that U.S. dominance has peaked, although it is not going away anytime soon. This is clear from the actual outcome of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, which is simply chaos. With regard to the conclusions we draw from this, it is a political necessity to disrupt imperialist activity. As long as we have capitalism, we will have the problems of imperialism. It does not matter who happens to be the top dog at a particular time, imperialism will always be a mechanism for the imposition of capitalist order. If we are going to be strict about the terms, to be anti-capitalist is to be anti-imperialist.

Joseph Green: The struggles of the Arab Spring have led some to ask: “Should we side with anti-imperialism or should we back the anti-fascist struggle?” This is a false dichotomy, for there is neither real anti-imperialism nor real anti-fascism without the masses. I refer to such so-called anti-imperialism as “non-class anti-imperialism,” a would-be anti-imperialism that attributes every development in the world to this or that Western power or corporation and fails to grapple with what is going on among the masses themselves. “Non-class anti-imperialism” is very widespread on the Left. Over the past few decades, it has repeatedly degenerated into support for oppressive tyrannies and despair over the prospects for mass struggle. Several left-wing groups even regard the Taliban as waging anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan. All of this has threatened

to discredit anti-imperialism in the eyes of millions of people. The “non-class anti-imperialists” argue that when a regime comes into conflict with the U.S. state, even if such a regime has worked closely with U.S. imperialism before, the internal situation of the country it governs is irrelevant. They ask: “Didn’t Lenin say in his article ‘Socialism and War’ that it did not matter who attacked first, India or Britain, because it would be a war of aggression on Britain’s part and a war of defense on India’s—is there any reference there to the internal situation in India?”

But Lenin contended that a great revolutionary wave was spreading across India and elsewhere, a gigantic movement that imperialism was seeking to suppress. Millions upon millions of oppressed people were standing up in opposition to old social relations and this process had been developing for decades. War was the continuation of politics by other means, since a democratic movement of liberation was taking place in India and elsewhere. In that light, such matters as who struck first were not particularly relevant.

The issue today is: What is the longstanding situation that has led to the Arab Spring and the uprising against Gadhafi and the Assad regime? The people of the region are standing up to demand a say in their lives. The situation now is different from the revolutionary wave in the immediate years after the Second World War. Then, in the Middle East, there was a series of struggles waged by colonies for independence and the overthrow of monarchies. In some countries, working-class parties fought for influence. These struggles changed the face of the Middle East and North Africa and brought economic development—albeit capitalist modernization—but, in country after country, the resulting governments became long-lasting dictatorships that humiliated working people and destroyed their organizations, or transformed such organizations into adjuncts of bourgeois rule. These governments spoke in terms of old ideals and aspirations—even in terms of socialism—but the old revolutionary movement was dead. Typical for these countries, with their supposedly anti-imperialist regimes, Syria and Libya cooperated with U.S. and British imperialism in the torture of each other’s prisoners.

Taking place today is neither the re-colonization of the region nor an anti-imperialist struggle, but rather the masses are fighting for the right to breathe in their own countries. This is not the result of manipulation by foreign powers, but these powers are seeking either to smash the movement or to use it to their interest. No upsurge against these regimes could have succeeded without the global imperialists being divided among themselves. It may perhaps appear that we are facing a wave of democratic revolutions in the Middle East, like those that swept Asia earlier, but this is not the case. We are facing important struggles that have ended decades of political stagnation, but no matter how bitter or tragic the fighting, they are not democratic social revolutions of the old type. What is effectively taking place in the Arab world is a process of liberalization, as took place in the Philippines with the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship, as took place in Mexico with the end of the one-party rule of the PRI, and as took place in Eastern Europe and Russia with the downfall of state capitalism. These are revolutions in the narrow sense, but capitalist development has generally proceeded far enough in these countries that there is no basis for the old-style democratic revolution that eliminated feudalism and semi-feudalism in the countryside. At the same time, the working class is far too disorganized, thus negating the possibility of a socialist revolution. The democratic social revolution is a matter of the past and the socialist revolution is a matter of the future. This affects the character of these movements and, over and over again, the resulting regimes are a disappointment. In these struggles, the working class may fight but it is politically disorganized, as it is around the world.

Nowhere in the world yet does the working class lead such struggles. So the result of such struggles, if these struggles are successful, is that the political situation might open up to this or that extent, but the new regimes will ultimately pursue market-fundamentalist measures. The masses may achieve some political rights, but they will not achieve economic liberation. These are not the grand, liberating revolutions one dreams of but rather liberalizations that may possibly lead to intensifying class struggles. Does this mean that these struggles are useless? Not from a Marxist standpoint. For Marxism, class struggle is the path towards organizing the working class and preparing for socialist revolution. From the standpoint of utopianism, these struggles have failed. From the standpoint of organizing the working class, these struggles are essential. If one genuinely believes that the working class is the master of revolution and the motor of history, then these struggles are our struggles. If one disregards these struggles, one becomes utopian or, worse, an unwitting backer of rival imperialisms.

This situation has tested the political stands and theoretical views of the various trends on the Left. Some supported these struggles because they thought the working class might be liberated. The Trotskyist sects, for example, had to do this as part of their theory of so-called “Permanent Revolution.” Various groups declared that these struggles had to bring the working class to power or else they would accomplish nothing. These struggles continue to disappoint the Trotskyist groups. The perspective of such groups had a marked utopian flavor: either full liberation now or forget it.

Let us also examine the standpoint of an ordinary democrat. I know this does not sound like a very radical thing to consider but it is instructive. Marwan Bishara is a senior political analyst at Al-Jazeera and he wrote a book called *The Invisible Era: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolution*. This book is an expression of a certain stage of the Arab Awakening, namely the period of democratic euphoria. He is passionate about what he calls today’s revolution and how it is completing the previous wave of struggles. In his terms, today’s revolution is liberating the people, while earlier struggles liberated the land. He is not aware that the class, social, and political alliances that have brought about the Arab Spring are inevitably going to break down and lead to a period of struggles, haggling, and popular depression. Nor does Bishara realize how serious is the threat of very horrible setbacks, such as periods of fundamentalist government. He has no idea that democracy and liberalization will lead to mass struggle, and that the more

thorough democracy is, and the more successful the working class is in utilizing this democracy, the more intense will be the resulting struggles.

From the standpoint of the political trends I support, it was clear from the start of the Arab Spring that everywhere different class factions opposed the old regimes and everywhere different class interests were represented in the movements. It was also clear that these struggles were not anti-imperialist and that the need to resort to a certain amount of Western imperialist military support was a danger to them. We continue to oppose Western imperialist aims, but we also recognize the legitimacy of insurgencies taking advantage of the differences among foreign powers.

This mixed situation is characteristic of the struggles today. The working class today is disorganized and in crisis around the world. The working masses are divided by a multitude of differences. In this situation, the major struggles that break out are not dominated by the revolutionary viewpoint. However, to abandon these struggles is to make a mockery of belief in, and support for, class struggle. Thus, we have a choice: either utopianism—that is, abstaining from all struggles until one great revolutionary struggle appears—or determining where the working-class struggle lies in these struggles, and using these struggles as a means for the working class to learn the interests and features of the different classes and to become class-conscious.

“Non-class anti-imperialism” adjudicates these struggles not in terms of their effects on the masses, but rather in terms of how they affect relations between the different imperialist powers. This form of anti-imperialism does not realize that the temporary gains or losses of this or that Great Power, or of this or that multinational corporation, are at most minor aspects of these struggles. The most important factor is how these struggles open a pathway to the class struggle. Moreover, “non-class anti-imperialism” misunderstands the nature of imperialism today. It is not enough to say that imperialism still exists today. One has to be able to see what has changed in the situation and how the basic features of imperialism remain despite these changes.

Several of these changes are of particular importance today. For the sake of brevity, let us deal with just one: the rise of new imperial powers. “Non-class anti-imperialists” believe that only the countries that were imperialist a century ago can be imperialist today. They ignore the rise of new imperialist powers and would-be imperialist powers. They may even argue that the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—are some type of bulwark against U.S. imperialism. However, the working masses of the BRICS face the opposition of the imperialist bourgeoisie of these countries. Now, it is not only the BRICS bourgeoisie who have become imperialist. The bourgeoisie of all countries with some advantages, and which thus can exercise influence, have sought to become an imperialist power and to join the Great Powers. The failure to recognize the new imperialism, and the backing of one imperialist or regional power against another, are travesties of anti-imperialism. We live in the most powerful imperialist country, which remains the world’s only superpower. The only way to undermine this imperialism is to support the development of working-class struggle around the world. Whatever aids this development, ultimately assists the anti-imperialist struggle. Whatever aids other imperialist powers that seek to hold down the working class, ultimately retards the anti-imperialist struggle.

Larry Everest: What should we think about imperialism? Let us begin with what it has done to Iraq over the last ten years. We need a theoretical sense and, especially living in this country that has caused so much murder and mayhem in the world, a visceral sense of what imperialism is. In Iraq, over 120,000 people were directly killed in the war, 1.2 to 1.4 million people have died since the 2003 invasion, over four million have been wounded or injured, and over four and a half million have been driven from their homes. What about the situation of women in Iraq? It has worsened: a secular constitution has been replaced by Sharia law, there are two million widows, and there is an epidemic of violence against women that is more and more institutionalized. In Fallujah, the rate of malformation of children is greater than that of Hiroshima due to white phosphorous and depleted uranium weapons that were used there beginning in 2004. There is the torture and degradation of thousands and thousands of Iraqis in U.S.-run prisons. The U.S. has fostered a reactionary, sectarian civil war under the Malaki government that it placed in power, a civil war that includes torture with electric drills, massive ethnic cleansing, and secret U.S. support for death squads [the so-called “Salvador option,” as Rumsfeld put it]. What we are describing here in Iraq, we can find in countries around the world. And then we can talk about the fact that around the world ten million children die of starvation or preventable diseases every single year. There is a global sex-trafficking industry that is based on the rape of millions of women a year. There is the destruction of the environment. There is the global horror of poverty. All this is the product of imperialism. The single greatest obstacle for humanity today is the system of imperialism, particularly U.S. imperialism. The single greatest thing we can do for humanity is to overthrow U.S. imperialism as soon as possible and usher in a world free of imperialism.

What is imperialism? To be clear, the invasion of Iraq was not Bush’s war as so many thought. It was not on behalf of corporations. It was not fought for the military-industrial complex. It was not an erroneous foreign policy based on faulty intelligence. The invasion was a war of imperialism, a war fought to further the interests of a worldwide empire based on plunder and exploitation, an empire rooted in the dynamics of capital accumulation on a global scale. The U.S. maintains a global empire with a home base in the United States itself. The U.S. state is the embodiment, personification, and enforcer of this global empire. Regardless of who is in power, as we have seen with Obama, the function and role of the U.S. state is to maintain this global system of empire. This is a system that requires the exploitation of markets, labor, and resources across the world. This is a system that is based on a great division of the world, a



Protesters march down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol in Washington, D.C. on September 15, 2007. The march was organized by Veterans for Peace and the ANSWER Coalition.

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fundamental production relation, and the domination and control of the vast majority of humanity in the oppressed colonial or third-world countries by the imperialist powers. Yes, there is complexity, there is development. However, we cannot ever forget that this production relation is foundational to the entire way the world works. On this point, Lenin is excellent.

Lenin’s work is not merely a technical manual on imperialism, but rather a polemic written against social chauvinism and capitulation in the name of the fatherland, and against basing political struggles on the bourgeoisified sections of the working class rather than on those who hungered or yearned for revolution. This is why the Second International was brought up here. This



Protesters from the ANSWER Coalition gathered outside the White House in Washington, D.C. after U.S. President Obama announced his intentions to militarily intervene in Syria, August 29, 2013.

was an International of betrayal and capitulation that sided with its own imperialists during the First World War, and that helped bring about the slaughter of millions of people. Lenin was the only one who broke with this capitulation and refused to go along with Kautsky’s traitorous betrayal. This is a lesson that we must learn very well here in the U.S. because we have to understand that every single aspect of this society is steeped in and infused with the parasitism that stems from the position of the U.S. in the world and U.S. domination. I am not arguing that there is not a great deal of oppression in this country, for there is, especially among black people. The situation among women is terrible, and there is a tremendous amount of poverty. Nevertheless, the thinking, the class relations, and the social relations of the U.S. are stamped, as Lenin put it, with a seal of parasitism derived from imperialism.

Thus, I think that one of the key things we have to do is point this out, counteract this, and fight for an orientation in which the whole world comes first. We have to reject any orientation in which the workers in this country, or a particular union, or a struggle in any particular place comes first. The whole world comes first and American lives are no more precious than the lives of other people. Right now, there should be thousands and thousands of people in the streets denouncing the torture taking place in Guantanamo and supporting the hunger strike that prisoners there are currently on; many of these prisoners are being force-fed by the U.S.

I think we have to argue for the fact that there is no such thing as a humanitarian intervention. This is a complete oxymoron. How can you have a humanitarian imperialist intervention? You can look at any country, including Iraq, where this was done—even what was done with the Kurds—and you will discover that every single thing the U.S. has done around the world is in the service of perpetuating its empire of exploitation and plunder in rivalry with other imperialist or would-be imperialist powers. The U.S. seeks strategic advantage by maintaining control over various regions of the world, which is of course why it is now threatening Iran.

The other matter we have to confront is the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a force that has been clashing with the United States, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bob Avakian, the chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, made a very important analysis of this phenomenon, situating it in “outmoded reactionary strata” while being clear that, on a world scale, imperialism wreaks far more havoc. The clash between U.S. imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism actually fuels a dynamic in which, if you support one, you are strengthening the other. This is a dynamic we urgently have to break out of, and the way in which we have to break out of it is through revolution.

The other panelists have failed to talk about revolution in any substantial way. They treat it as a very distant prospect. This is a powerful system but it is riddled with deep contradictions. Revolutions are possible due to these profound contradictions, based on the fact that the system is in direct antagonism to the interests of the vast majority of people.

Avakian has done path-breaking work in summing up the very important and emancipatory first wave of communism from Marx through Mao. By analyzing and summarizing the first wave’s great strengths and lessons, as well as its shortcomings and weaknesses, Avakian has brought forward a new synthesis of communism, as well as a strategy for making revolution right here in the belly of the beast. I do not have time to elaborate the entire strategy that the RCP has developed, but I recommend people see the film *BA Speaks: Revolution, Nothing Less!*. I would also recommend that people take a look at the “Constitution for the New Socialist Republic of North America” draft proposal, which is a thoroughly internationalist document. The proposal makes the argument that there is no genuine, emancipatory communist revolution that does not proceed from internationalism and on the principle that the whole world comes first. This constitution calls for—after the seizure of power and the creation of a revolutionary state, a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat—the immediate dismantling of U.S. bases all over the world, sundering all current trade and economic relations and restructuring those relations across the globe, making every economic decision on the basis of advancing the world revolution, meeting the needs of people here, and protecting the world’s environment. Among the key elements of the strategy for revolution are changing thinking and changing action. In terms of changing action, we vigorously oppose all U.S. interventions, sanctions, bullying, and threats throughout the world.

Q & A

I am curious how you perceive significant non-state actors such as the European Union and the United Nations. Are these imperialist institutions? Also, there seems to be disagreement among the panelists regarding the issue of inter-imperialist rivalry. Some speakers emphasized such rivalry, whereas the speaker from the RCP seems to think that there is no longer inter-imperialist rivalry, and that, basically, the U.S. runs the world.

JG: With regard to “non-state actors” such as the UN and the EU, I think this is an extremely important matter. I think the UN is fundamentally a world-imperialist agency that represents the interests of the leading imperialist powers. I am often astonished when people say: “Oh, you know, we’re against what’s going on in this or that country but the UN says otherwise!” What do you think the UN is? Whose interests does it represent? Yes, these are imperialist agencies.

LE: I was trying to make the opposite point, that there indeed is inter-imperialist rivalry, although perhaps not as pronounced. I think you misheard that.

JT: There is rivalry but there is no significant rival to the U.S. at the moment. Europe is not able to marshal forces such that it could inflict a defeat on America. China might be able to in another thirty years and perhaps Europe as well. However, at the moment, no power can seriously challenge the U.S. As for international organizations, such as the UN, these are crystallizations of relations of forces on a global level, both economic and military. In the contemporary world, the UN is effectively a tool of the U.S.-led state order.

I think one of the motivations for this panel is the ten-year anniversary of the Iraq War. Why was the anti-war movement, which entailed millions of people mobilizing across cities throughout the world, not able to build a movement towards socialism—a working-class, proletariat, class-conscious movement? Why was it not able to do this, in your estimation?

LE: I think the mass anti-war movement showed potential insofar as it exposed the depths of the people’s hatred for what was going on, but I think it also showed that any movement struggling for socialism has to be led by a revolutionary vanguard party. Even if they are opposed to a particular action of the ruling class, people do not spontaneously understand what is driving this action, what the solution to it is, and what sacrifices and struggles are required in order to realize this solution. I think it is particularly important that the revolutionary movement be rooted in those that society has cast off. I was in San Francisco and I was at the major demonstration. Afterwards, I think what happened was that a lot of people were sucked into the illusions of U.S. democracy. That is, if you simply got rid of Bush or elected Kerry in 2004, somehow things would change. They did not understand what we are talking about on this panel, that what exists in the U.S. is not democracy. It is capitalism, imperialism, and the political structures that support them. I think the other major issue that people do not want to face intellectually, in terms of their activity, is what it is going to take to actually challenge U.S. imperialism. I do want to commend and uphold the work of “World Can’t Wait” in organizing to try to drive out the Bush regime at the time. In leading this effort, “World Can’t Wait” sought to change the whole political terrain, to prepare the political terrain for revolution.

JG: I think the anti-war movement played a tremendous role with regard to motivating the Left. In my own case, the war in Vietnam played a very important role in how I became a communist, and in generating a desire both to defeat U.S. imperialism and to find a force capable of doing it. With regard to the struggle against the war in Iraq, I do not think the movement was flawed because things ultimately did not move further. I think it is a very serious issue. The working class is disorganized. Trade unions almost everywhere are class collaborationists. The political parties that one would expect to support the working class do not support it. For example, the Socialist International maintained relations with the Mubarak regime until right before its downfall. Ali in Tunisia maintained relations with the Socialist International. There exists a great deal of disorganization, and the anti-war movement by itself could not overcome it. Now, it is not simply a matter of subjective desire when these struggles grow to a certain level. There are certain objective conditions. From my point of view, I think the anti-war movement played a tremendously important role, and the people who took part in it will remember their experience. However, this one struggle alone could not change the whole situation.

I would like to push the panelists on the topic of the anti-Iraq War movement. Recognizing that the anti-war movement did not succeed, I am wondering whether or not it contributed to the confusion regarding what it means to be anti-imperialist today?

JT: It is clear that the demonstrations against the war in Libya and the war in Syria were pretty depressing experiences in Britain. There were two to three hundred people outside of the embassy and half of them were vigorously pro-Assad types with dubious politics and the other half were liberal Iranians. They would get into physical fights. It was a far cry from 2003, when we had one and a half million people out in the streets. It was an enormous opportunity. However, there will be another anti-war movement on that scale as long as they keep having these bloody wars. I cannot speak about the U.S., but the Left in Britain made an error when it did not realize that the situation had changed after 2003, after the troops went in. In the run up to this, it was clear that large sections of the international bourgeoisie, for their own reasons, thought that this was not a good policy. This is why there were all the issues surrounding UN resolutions and the French opposition to the invasion of Iraq. The international bourgeoisie were bashing heads with each other, which actually meant that it was easier than it was ever going to be again to get through this message to oppose the war. That is why I said earlier,

one has to take advantage of these moments of mass demonstration. This was a real opening and a real opportunity and it is not gone completely.

LE: First, the revolutionary communists were not confused. They realized that, unless you overthrow imperialism, wars are going to continue. Furthermore, they realized that a mass movement is not going to sustain itself in the way that some people expect. The anti-war movement was a spontaneous struggle. It included a very broad section of the middle class, and masses of people came out in support of it, but it nevertheless was a spontaneous struggle. The idea that one could simply take up this spontaneous struggle and gradually push it towards revolution is what may have confused some people. I think it is important that the RCP’s strategy—which is in *Basics*, and I highly recommend people read that strategy for revolution—entails seizing on these outbreaks and crises in order to broadly plant the pole of revolutionary communism, to build an organization, and to raise the consciousness of the masses of people to the realization that anything less than revolution is bullshit. While a revolutionary crisis did not take place on February 15, 2003, the mass demonstrations certainly showed the potential for millions and millions of people to be drawn into political life very quickly. The key is that the revolutionaries have to accumulate the political strength to lead the masses in a revolutionary direction during a crisis. Then, when millions of people are determined not to live in the same way and the rulers are divided, you actually have the prospect of seizing state power, which is ultimately the only thing that is going to end imperialist wars. Certainly, war flows from the core dynamics of imperialism. We should expose where these wars come from and why revolution, and an entirely different economic and political system, are needed to prevent them. I also want to point out that one of the things the bourgeoisie did in response to this uprising and upheaval was to put in power Barack Obama, whose mission is not to change what the ruling class is doing but rather to bamboozle the masses into passivity. I am not saying this passivity is simply a result of Obama’s presidency, but achieving it was and is the chief mission of the Obama administration. Putting Obama in power allowed for a rebranding of imperialism and quieted the growing discontent. There was tremendous hatred of Bush and in many ways we were starting to see the beginnings of a legitimacy crisis.

Do you think the oppressed people of Libya, the working class and peasants, would have been better off had the West been able to prevent a NATO military intervention?

LE: I am against NATO military intervention in Libya. I am not a supporter of the Gadhafi regime. Raymond Lotta wrote a very excellent article on this in *Revolution*. The NATO intervention was an intervention by imperialism to put pro-U.S. reactionaries in power and kill

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case of reification. But reification does not obtain in all forms of capitalist production.

JS: In an essay you wrote that concludes the *Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, entitled “A social pathology of reason: on the intellectual legacy of Critical Theory,” you argue that the process of social rationalization, or what Hegel would have called the historical unfolding of freedom, has been interrupted, and that it is the task of Critical Theory to think through the contradiction between capitalism and the aspirations of bourgeois society. You claim that this interruption poses a moral or ethical challenge, whose resolution does not necessarily require the sublation of capitalism, and that history has demonstrated that the “Marxist wing of left Hegelianism” was wrong, since the working class did not “automatically develop a revolutionary readiness.” You argue that, in light of the failure of Marxism, psychoanalysis may offer powerful tools for analyzing social irrationality. In your view, what would be the significance of psychoanalysis for a revitalized emancipatory politics?

AH: It is a very complicated question. First, I would not claim that Marxism as such has failed, but that it has clearly erred in one respect, namely in its conviction that the proletariat or the class of the labor force will automatically develop a critical perspective. An empirical doubt of that premise had already been formulated by the early Frankfurt School. Their starting point, in a way, was hesitation as to precisely that premise.

I think Adorno and some of the other representatives of the Frankfurt School relied mainly on psychoanalysis as a way to think through the emancipatory mechanisms already immanent in capitalism. In certain passages Adorno suggests that a certain component of our psychic life simply resists the existent capitalist conditions because of the element of suffering implicit in these conditions. However, if you follow Freud, suffering produces certain dispositions, not for emancipation, but for enlightening knowledge. Nonetheless, Adorno, until the end, believed in that kind of psychic mechanism. With Marcuse it is completely different. Marcuse argued there are certain drives that permanently resist the capitalist form of rationalization, which would point to a completely different usage of psychoanalysis. But, regarding how I think psychoanalysis might contribute to emancipation, I would give several answers. First, I am most interested in object relations theory, a certain strain within psychoanalysis. In brief, I think this strain, and the work of Donald Winnicott in particular, is very helpful in order to think about emancipatory moments in normal human life. More generally, one element I would take from psychoanalysis is a deep suspicion about the completely rational actor. Psychoanalysis is one tradition among others that helps us to see that human beings are driven not only by their purposive rational interests, but also by their unconscious wishes. I take this insight to be necessary for any analysis of emancipatory potentialities within a given capitalist society.

JS: In a recent interview, you announced your support for the Institute for Comparative Irrelevance (Institut für die Vergleichende Irrelevanz, or Ivi), just before the

many, many people. Certainly, the RCP protested and opposed the NATO intervention in Libya.

JG: The movement in Libya was not a creation of foreign powers. It was an upsurge of the Libyan people who had been oppressed for decades. There were no independent trade unions and no political rights. The Berber people in Libya were being compulsorily turned into Arabs and their national identity was denied. The Libyan uprising was a genuine uprising. The Libyan uprising did not require a massive foreign intervention on the ground. However, it did require a U.S. intervention in the air. Without that intervention, it is likely that the rebels would have drowned in blood in Benghazi and elsewhere. Our task is always to expose the imperialist motives of our government. We know the U.S. government did not do this out of humanitarian motives, but it was nevertheless legitimate for the Libyan people to take advantage of this contradiction among the imperialists. It is astonishing that a person who defends the Soviet Union for receiving massive U.S., British, and French support in the Second World War would deny the Libyan people the right to have these alliances. That said, it makes for a complicated political situation and it is one of the reasons why the anti-war movement got disoriented.

JT: I disagree. I think it is too early to tell but there are not promising signs. We have seen this kind of parachuting-in of a government before, a government that does not really seem to have power in the country. I do not foresee a stable state regime emerging from this situation. Approximately ten years after the U.S. invasion, Hamid Karzai legalized marital rape in Afghanistan. This is already happening in Libya. There is no way around it. A lot of people died because NATO blew them up. However, the uprising would have been crushed by Gadhafi. The problem is that we are not learning from the lessons of Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. It is clear that the U.S.-led international imperialist order is increasingly unable to impose a state regime in occupied regions, even one that serves its own interests. I think the euphoria of the Arab Spring led people to think that these movements were just going to sweep up everything. It is clear that has not happened. If you look at what has happened in Egypt, it is clear that things are entering a bad stage. The underlying point is that there is going to be either tyranny or chaos, and my judgment is that we will end up with chaos. **IP**

Transcribed by Danny Jacobs

building it has occupied for nearly a decade was seized. In a February 2012 dispatch entitled, “Critical Thinking Needs and Takes Time and Space,” available on its website, the Ivi writes that it sees itself as offering an alternative form of politics based around a self-organized space within which it is possible for participants of any age, gender, or ethnicity to achieve autonomy.² Do you think this sort of alternative political project realizes, or at least approximates, the kind of mutual recognition and de-reifying behavior that you call for in your work? Adorno argues in several places, most notably in his late essay “Resignation,” that attempts to “rescue enclaves of immediacy in the midst of a thoroughly mediated and rigidified society” amount to pseudo-activity, obscuring the need for change on the level of society.³ How would you respond to this critique?

AH: I would hope that the notion of mutual forms of recognition can help to make a little bit clearer what Adorno had in mind, actually. Concerning the Institute for Comparative Irrelevance, I think one should support it, simply because this is one expression of the interests of students to have alternative spaces for their own way of thinking, within a non-regulated, non-hierarchical form of university education. And I think it is a good sign for a generation of students if they develop interest in creating such spaces. I do not think that these spaces represent another form of life. In the Ivi’s own self-description it does sound as though the Ivi has already created an alternative form of life. I do not think it has done that, but the Ivi nevertheless has, through a legitimate form of occupation, created a unique place close to the university. They occupied the building in order to reclaim a space for free thinking and free discussion outside the control of official representatives of knowledge. I think this is a good step. There is still a determined group of students who believe they need these places, beyond the specific regulations of education within the university, where they can debate and discuss their own matters, their own theoretical interests, their own insights. It is a good sign if a university allows those spaces, because that’s the whole idea of a university—not to distribute formal knowledge that allows one to attain a position within society, but to represent a space where free thinking is possible. And, if the usual forms of teaching are being put under greater pressure of certain economic interests, then more places like the Ivi become necessary. **IP**

1. Adorno, Theodor, “Reflections on Class Theory,” in *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 110.
2. The full text of “Critical Thinking Needs and Takes Time and Space” (“Kritisches Denken braucht-und nimmt sich-Zeit und Raum”) can be found online at <http://ivi.copyright.com/ueber-2>.
3. Adorno, Theodor, “Resignation,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 291.

On becoming things

An interview with Axel Honneth

Jensen Suther

On July 3rd, 2013, at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt, Germany, Jensen Suther interviewed Axel Honneth, director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and author of numerous books and articles, on behalf of *Platypus*. Their conversation focused on the problem of “reification,” or the tendency for processes of transformation to appear as, and be treated as if they were, static objects of an immutable nature. Reification was the theme of several writings Honneth delivered as the Tanner Lectures at Berkeley in 2005. These lectures are compiled in the book *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2012). What follows is an edited transcript of their discussion.



Georg Lukács in 1913.

Jensen Suther: In your 2005 Tanner Lecture series, you argue that Georg Lukács’s Marxist analysis of the problem of reification is problematic, particularly in that he ascribes the overcoming of alienated social relations to the working class. You end the lecture by emphasizing that, *pace* Lukács, for whom reification is generated by

the commodity form, different sets of social practices give rise to reifying behavior and no one group, class, or social movement can be singularly assigned the task of abolishing reified social relations. However, reification has historically been an important concept for the Left. Do you see the critique of reification as necessarily leftist? How, if at all, does your contribution to the discourse on reification relate to the Left?

Axel Honneth: This is a surprising question, one I would not have thought to ask, so my answer comes very much *ad hoc*. I do not believe that concepts belong to any specific political community or group. The degree to which concepts help us explore something or see something new, they should be taken as an instrument potentially available for everyone in society. So, in that sense, I do not believe that reification is an automatically leftist concept. Moreover, in terms of the history of ideas, I am not even sure that reification is necessarily a concept developed only by leftists. For instance, the French Marxist thinker Lucien Goldmann sought to demonstrate the similarities between the approaches of Lukács and Heidegger. You can find in Heidegger an idea of reification, which already indicates that reification was a concept also utilized by the right, or on the right. There are many problems with Lukács’s analysis. The almost mystical role he assigns the proletariat is only one of them. Even if we grant that his was one of the most fruitful periods in the Left tradition, in the history of Western Marxism, I think that today we can see much more clearly the limits of that analysis and the mistakes bound up with those limits. And, surely, the biggest mistake is not only the emphasis on the world-historical role of the proletariat, but also how this is emphasized, namely by way of a very peculiar set of background ideas, let’s say, about the social structure of reality. Lukács relies on a kind of Fichtean-Hegelian metaphysical concept by which all human society is thought to be grounded in a certain kind of world-constituting activity, and so Lukács thinks that the only class that can overcome reification, which is seen as

the destruction of that world-constituting activity, is the class which is representing—even under alienated or distorted conditions—that kind of praxis. Therefore, we have this almost fantastic piece within the whole study, wherein Lukács wants to reveal this one moment of the overcoming of these distorted conditions. For Lukács, this moment looks almost like this one revolutionary act; I mean, you almost get the sense that in one second all these destructive conditions are overcome. It’s a very peculiar analysis—enormously inspiring, but also very strange.

JS: You argue in your 2005 lectures that reification does not eliminate non-reified forms of social praxis, but only papers over them, and you claim that this was also Lukács’s position. In other words, you argue that a “genuine form of human existence,” one based on mutual recognition, perseveres beneath reified social relations. Even if this is the case, is it possible to grasp this genuine, underlying social reality, “as it really is”? Or is it rather the case, as Theodor Adorno suggests, that misrecognition is constitutive of our social condition? And what of Lukács’s claim that the commodity form not only generates reification, but also produces consciousness?

AH: That strikes me as an epistemological question, or probably better still an ontological question: If we grant the condition that reification is constitutive of our society, how could we ever attain a less distorted, or “undisturbed,” form of praxis? If we are to avoid contradicting ourselves, we can only hold out hope for this better form of praxis if we also believe that there must always already be an element of the better, undisturbed form of praxis in our already existing society. This is a difficult issue in Lukács. One way to understand him is to say that all praxis in the present moment of capitalist society is completely reified. But then you have this problem of how one has access to any sense that an undistorted form of praxis is possible. In Adorno it is trickier still. Even when Adorno is saying that reification is constitutive, he believes that there are still alternatives, or signs of another form of praxis. Be it in art, the artwork, or be it in small examples of everyday practices—there are, he claims, elements of an undistorted practice. So in Adorno you have this idea of the immanent appearance of an undistorted praxis, whereas Lukács is much more radical in his claim that reification is total. But this makes it much more difficult for Lukács to think the revolution, or think social change. Thus for Lukács it has to be this completely eschatological transformation, a complete reversal. With respect to this question I think Adorno is more open.

JS: To come back to the last part of my previous question, isn’t it the case, for Lukács and Adorno, that reification does not merely represent the ossification of social relations, nor just the objectification of individuals? For both thinkers reification also had a positive significance, as the basis for abolishing current social

relations. Adorno, for instance, in his “Reflections on Class Theory,” argues that, “in reified human beings reification finds its outer limits.”¹ In several places



The interior of the Institute for Comparative Irrelevance, Frankfurt, Germany.

Adorno stresses that every second nature is always already a new first nature. Similarly, Lukács speaks of how, during a revolutionary period in the crisis of capital, one sees the *intensification*, not the diminution, of reification. Indeed, he makes clear that reification is integral to the dialectic of theory and practice, and not simply an obstacle to it. How does this dimension of reification figure into your account? Or, to put the question a different way, what are the limitations to the immanent analysis of reification?

AH: I do not see that, I’m afraid. That has to do, I think, with one’s strategy for identifying reification. There is a huge difference between Lukács and Adorno, on one side, and myself, on the other. For them, the background idea is that capitalist exchange relations, as such, are producing reification. I have doubts about such a totalizing idea. I do not think forms of reification are automatically or necessarily produced by capitalist societies, but rather that specific forms of capitalism and specific forms of practices within capitalism are what produce really reified attitudes. Aside from this difference, however, I also think that Adorno and Lukács make mistakes even in terms of their own conceptualizations. If you take reification literally, which I think Lukács wants to do, then you cannot really say that all economic exchange, even exchange directly involving the labor force, is reification as *such*. Not all practices involved in the production process necessarily require that the human potentialities of the workers must be exacted from them. Capitalist production as such entails the use, as a commodity, of the human potentialities of the labor force, but only in some specific cases does this form of production also exhibit the opposite—namely, an ignorance of, or disregard for, human potential. Only in these particular cases does it make sense to speak of reification. In the sex trade, for example, we have a clear

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The Turkish War of Independence, the CHP subjected the TKP to a number of purges (1925, 1927, and 1929) after the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923. These purges weakened the TKP and caused the party to be marginalized from politics after the transition to multi-party elections in 1945.² After the transition into a multi-party system, the CHP lost its first election to the Democratic Party (DP) in 1950. The military coup in 1980 saw all political parties, including the CHP, banned. The Democratic Left Party (DSP) and the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) succeeded the banned party until the pre-1980 political parties were re-legalized in 1992. In 1995, the SHP and the CHP merged into one party under the CHP party umbrella while the DSP remained independent until 2010 when the party administration was finally persuaded to merge with the CHP. Emphasizing a strictly secular, statist, and nationalist political tradition, the CHP, despite being the second most popular political party in Turkey, has not won a popular election since 1977. The elitist historical lineage and the secular, statist, nationalist dogmatism of the political party prevents it from gaining popular appeal within the religious and ethnic under-classes of Turkey and tends to be favored by the secular, white-collar class. Despite electing Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who is partly of Alevi-Kurdish ancestry, as its new party leader in 2010, the CHP has not yet managed to reach out to the masses of Turkey nor reap any significant electoral gains. On the other hand, the BDP is a left social-democratic political party with a Kurdish ethnic underpinning. Though debates have been initiated by the symbolic leader of the Kurdish movement, Abdullah Öcalan, about trying to evolve from the ethnic nationalist line of the BDP towards a wider political platform under the Peoples’ Democratic Congress (HDK), the BDP is still firmly an ethnic party dominated by Kurds and the Alevi religious minority. The political tradition of the BDP comes from a long line of political parties that have been banned by the Turkish state in its efforts to curb nascent Kurdish separatism from the late 1970s onwards. The first pro-Kurdish party, the Peoples’ Labour Party (HEP) was founded by seven members of the Social Democratic Populist Party who had been expelled from the party on allegations of Kurdish separatism. Existing for just three years, HEP was banned in 1993 by the Turkish Constitutional Court for the promotion of Kurdish rights and was succeeded by the Democracy Party (DEP). DEP became divided over the issue of support for the outlawed Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), and six deputies of the party were arrested by the Turkish state and sentenced to 15 years in prison. The party was closed down in 1994 and was succeeded by the People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) in the same year. HADEP was a moderate Kurdish political party that tried to distance itself from the PKK. Nevertheless, HADEP was closed down due to allegations of political support for the PKK in 2003 and was succeeded by the Democratic Society party (DTP). DTP was also dissolved by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 2008 for promoting Kurdish nationalism and was succeeded by the BDP. The emergence of the Kurdish question is very related to the rise of the revolutionary left in the 1970s. Rather than the Kurdish question being important for the Left, it is the Left that is important for

the Kurdish question. Prior to the 1960s, Kurdish ethnicity was severely repressed during both single-party and multi-party rule. It was from the 1960s onwards that Kurdish nationalism re-emerged in Turkey through the contact of Kurdish intellectuals with Marxism and anti-imperialist struggle in the FKF. One could argue that Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has always been a socialist and anti-imperialist ideology. This has also a lot to do with the social organization of Kurdish society. The patriarchal, conservative, clan-based organization of Kurdish society has always profited from maintaining the status quo with the Turkish state and marginalizing any grassroots egalitarian movements. Kurdish nationalism is a rejection of the inequalities created within Kurdish society through clan politics just as much as it is a rejection of Turkish cultural imperialism. After 1971, the Kurdish movement, just like the radical left, realized that their demands for cultural rights would not be implemented through parliamentary reform. The failure of parliamentary politics after 1971 can be seen as the start of PKK’s armed revolutionary struggle against the Turkish state. While the representational, parliamentary left is still experiencing an identity crises vis-à-vis the populist, Islamic, neo-liberal politics of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Gezi Park protests have contributed to the revitalization of those segments of the radical left that are detached from the Kurdish movement. The distancing of the radical left from the Kurdish movement can be attributed to the silence of the BDP over the protests due to ongoing peace negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government. The only BDP MP to take an active stance on the protests, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, has been ostracized and excluded from the team of BDP representatives who are in dialogue with Abdullah Öcalan. This political situation has created the opportunity for the radical left to pursue an independent agenda, perhaps for the first time since 1980. **History of the Radical Left in Turkey** The origins of the revolutionary, non-parliamentary left in Turkey can be traced to the Federation of Debate Clubs (FKF), which was a network of university clubs founded in 1965 by Marxist political science students studying in the various universities of Ankara. By the end of the late 1960s, the federation had expanded to include political science clubs throughout Turkey and had grown into an active platform of debate and dialogue for students active in the Turkish left. The events of 1968 and the ongoing anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Latin America were inspiration for the participants of the FKF and the network eventually began to take a more radical stance as Turkey’s participation in the Cold War and NATO deepened. The FKF evolved into the Turkish Revolutionary Youth Federation (Dev-Genç) in 1969 and decided to take up revolutionary struggle against the Turkish state. After the military coup of 1971, Dev-Genç was banned by the state and continued its revolutionary efforts as an underground, clandestine organization. While Dev-Genç was primarily a student movement, a number of armed groups including People’s Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO), People’s Salvation Party Front of Turkey (THKP-C), the Maoist Revolu-

tionary Workers and Peasants Party of Turkey (TIKKP) and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) were organized out of Dev-Genç members after the banning of Dev-Genç in 1971. The failure of armed struggle against the Turkish state during the mid- to late 1970s meant that the core cadres of the radical Left were either imprisoned or killed. By the end of the 1970s, THKP-C had evolved into the pacifist, legalistic Revolutionary Way (Dev-Yol) from which a splinter group advocating armed struggle, Revolutionary Left (Dev-Sol) emerged in 1978. On the other hand, THKO ceased to exist after the execution of its founding members (Huseyin Inan, Yusuf Aslan, and Deniz Gezmi) in 1972 by military authorities. In southeast Turkey, the PKK took up a protracted armed conflict against the state that has lasted until today. The Turkish Communist Party-Marxist Leninist (TKP-ML) split from the TIKKP in 1972 and the party evolved into a legal political entity, the Workers and Peasants Party of Turkey (TIKP), in 1974. However, after founder Ibrahim Kaypakkaya died in 1973 while under state arrest, the TKP-ML slipped into the Workers’ and Peasants’ Liberation Army in Turkey (TIKKO), founded in 1972, which advocates armed struggle. After the coup of 1980, most members of the radical left organizations were either executed or imprisoned by the junta, causing surviving members to either emigrate overseas or to go underground. The harsh political conditions imposed by the military junta combined with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact states and the USSR created a precarious political situation for the radical Left in Turkey. Most of the surviving factions found themselves marginalized by the PKK and the Kurdish movement. For example, Dev-Sol which, by 1994, had evolved into the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party–Front (DHKP/C), signed a cooperation agreement with the PKK in 1999, effectively subsuming DHKP/C into the much larger PKK. Factions such as the Kemalist-Maoist TIKP, which became the Worker’s Party (IP) in 1992, managed to stay independent from the PKK by acting as legal political parties but could not achieve electoral success. By the early 2000s, the radical left in Turkey was in a state of crisis. State prosecution had intensified over the 1990s with the enactment of the anti-terror bill in 1991 and many cadre members found themselves imprisoned with lengthy sentences. This turned prison dormitories into a recruiting ground for the radical left as imprisoned cadre members began to form cells that would be activated upon the completion of the prison sentences. To combat the situation, the Turkish state decided to put prisoners convicted of terrorism and armed struggle in the so-called “F-type” prison which was essentially a form of solitary confinement. The decision to move convicts into solitary confinement caused the inmates in Ankara, Aydin, Bayrampasa, Bartin, Buca, Bursa, Çankin, Çanakkale, Ceyhan, Gebze, Konya-Ermenek, Malatya, Nigde, Nevsehir, and Usak to go on a hunger strike during October 2000. In response to the hunger strike, Turkish security forces stormed the prisons in an operation, ironically named “Return to Life”, that resulted in the death of 30 prisoners and two soldiers. The survivors of the operation continued on with the hunger strikes resulting in the further deaths of 48 prisoners and 12 self-immolations. One of the effects of “Return to Life” was that the cadres of the radical Left were drastically diminished. Following this, any survivors of the hunger

strike and operation “Return to Life” were put into solidarity confinement, effectively ending the possibility of recruiting new cadre members.

Conclusion: The Other Gezi Park

After years of marginalization, the Gezi Park protests have created an opportunity for the radical left to re-establish itself as a player on the Turkish political scene. On the one hand, the protests pose an unprecedented opportunity for the radical left to reach out to a post-1989 generation, which has no recollection of Communism and radical student movements. On the other hand, the protests have created the opportunity for the radical left to update its theory and praxis to accommodate and comprehend the demands of a generation that has just begun to discover politicization. While it is too early to foresee the outcomes created by this cross-pollination between the radical left tradition and the post-1989 generation, what the Gezi Park protests demonstrate is that a collaboration between the two can pose a much more radical threat to the hegemony of the AKP, at a bio-political level, than any representational party currently active in Turkey. Although it is unlikely Gezi Park will ever translate into a wider political movement, the subjectivities created out of a common experience of police violence, as well as the establishment of new social networks between spheres of society, which have been fragmented and isolated through years of systemic neo-liberalization and consumer culture, are a much greater threat than anything electoral, as they will radically alter the dynamics of Turkish society in the next decade. **IP**

1. Former cadres of TIP went on to found the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) in 1996. The ÖDP, which was a coalition from the remaining leftist groups of the pre-1980 period, entered into a coalition with the Green party of Turkey in 2012, forming the Greens and the Left Party of the Future. Additionally, the TKP was re-established by former cadre members who took over the Party for Socialist Power (SIP) in 2001 and renamed it. The politics of the so-called “new” TKP has been described by many as chauvinistic, reactionary, and outdated, with some commentators going so far as to reject the historical lineage between the TKP of the 1920s and the new TKP.
2. The TKP has never won any seats in the Turkish parliament. Also, TIP, which was founded in 1961, had much more success in electoral politics. The TIP became the first independent socialist party to enter parliament in 1965.